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Navy Core Values and Grit in Action – A Trek to Mt. Everest Base Camp

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Hospital Corpsman First Class, Logan Ortlieb, U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 6 – Peru, trekked to Mt. Everest Base Camp, with eight trekking companions, March 2017. (photo courtesy HM1 Logan Ortlieb)

LIMA, PERU – Hospital Corpsman First Class Logan Ortlieb from the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 6 – Peru (NAMRU-6) trekked to the base camp of one of the tallest mountains in the world – Mt. Everest, March 2017. “I am always looking for something to push me out of my comfort zone and push me to be a better person; climbing at 18,000 feet is great way to test your mental strength,” said Ortlieb.

After 36 hours of travel, Ortlieb and his eight trekking companions from all over the world,

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including people from England, Brazil, Norway, New Zealand and the U.S. arrived in Lukla, Nepal, where they began their 13-day journey to reach Mt. Everest base camp.

“After landing in Lukla, I remember the feeling I had when I saw my first 6000 meter mountain in the Himalayas. That was the moment I knew it was game time and there was no turning back,” said Ortlieb.

Through mountains, trees, villages and more, Ortlieb and his group made a total trek over 77 miles in extreme conditions, such as high altitude, low oxygen levels, and extreme temperature changes.

“This is often the first true test of an individual’s will before he or she attempts to summit Everest,” said Ortlieb.

The group traveled an average of seven hours a day, gaining between 500 to 1000 meters in elevation with each passing day. Acclimatization rest days are important when it comes to trekking a mountain like Everest. Due to the high elevation and low oxygen levels, the body needs time to acclimatize and recuperate in order to avoid acute mountain sickness, which can have fatal consequences.

Ortlieb and his group spent acclimatization rest days in Namche Bazaar, a small village in Nepal, as well as Tengboche, a small village in Khumjung located in the Khumbu region of northeastern Nepal. Tengboche is home to a Buddhist monastery, Tengboche Monastery, Ortlieb experienced the local way of life, and had the opportunity to meditate with monks at the monastery. The incredibly arduous trek to reach Everest base camp would soon become one of the most challenging things Ortlieb has ever done.

“The harsh terrain, the lack of oxygen, and the weather were all obstacles to team success. In the morning before the sun came over the mountains, we were in freezing weather conditions with driving wind and snow, as soon as the light touches you, the temperature goes from freezing to 60°F, with the intense sunlight making it feel like it was 95-100°F. The constant change from shade to sunshine made our day-pack heavy with layers that we constantly put on and off as we moved from sunlight to shadow and back again.”

As with any major accomplishment, the feeling of tackling a challenge can be overwhelming.

“When we made it to base camp, the feeling of satisfaction was difficult to hide and we were all emotional. The mental and physical challenges we put ourselves through were worth every grueling step when we all finally stood as a team on the icefall at the base of Mt. Everest. We all cheered and congratulated one another. It was an individual accomplishment for me, but we were there as a team,” said Ortlieb.

A lover of the outdoors, he gained his interest in mountaineering after he was stationed at NAMRU-6.

“My first time trekking was what really made me interested, it was for my birthday – I made the famous Huayhuash trek, one of the most challenging and breathtaking treks in South America.

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People come from all over the world to adventure on this 14-day journey; passing over mountains, blue lagoons, and camping in valleys. I was hooked,” said Ortlieb.

Ortlieb joined the Navy in June, 2008. He has been stationed at USNH Rota Spain, and he served aboard the USS Arleigh Burke (DDG51) before being stationed at NAMRU-6 in September 2014.

“All of my military education and training paid off for this expedition. The concentration, courage, and physical training I've learned in the Navy, particularly the mental and physical rigors of ship and sea duty, prepared me well for the mental and physical challenges of this Everest base-camp trek.”

The Navy taught Ortlieb to live and work as a member of a team; whether on ship or shore, the team accomplishes the mission together. Ortlieb plans to conquer the highest peaks on all seven continents – Everest (Asia), Aconcagua (South America), Denali (North America), Kilimanjaro (Africa), Elbrus (Europe), Kosciuszko (Australia), and Vinson (Antarctica).

“I have come to love the ocean from all of my deployments, but I want to help show the world and the military community that the U.S. Navy is not only a superior sea fighting force, but our sailors can do anything from the depths of the ocean to the top of the world,” said Ortlieb. If there is a way I can represent the Navy by setting these goals and conquering them, it would be my honor.”

NAMRU-6, a subordinate command to the Naval Medical Research Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, conducts biomedical research in the field of infectious diseases and global health. NAMRU-6’s mission is to deliver life-saving products such as knowledge, technology, and medical materiel to sustain the effectiveness of the uniformed service members through respectful cooperation with various collaborators.

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